

## EDITORIAL

One of the fascinating topics in Comparative Religions is the study of "Myths". In recent times the Greek word *mythos* rendered as "Mythe" (1831, Keightley) or "myth" (1856, Max Müller) has got deeper implications and wider positive applications than it had in the nineteenth century when it was wrongly interpreted as "illusion", "fable", "fiction", "invention" and "falsification." Presently the origin of Myth is thereby grossly misunderstood and sensibly related to the interpretation of primeval history. The unrecorded antiquity of a particular people has been understood and reconstructed mostly by means of their myths, which are understood as creative and "symbolic history" of the encounter of their ancestors with the challenging realities of their times, terrestrial or celestial. This symbolic history has been usually couched in artistic language, employing charming symbols with a wide variety of meanings. One may generalize this feature of the cultural history of religious myths, with due reservations, to conclude that the creative period of "primeval myths" coincides with the stage of the *homo sapiens* in the development of anthropological evolution. Of course, in the process of transmission, ancient myths seem to have undergone interpretative modifications in the course of cultural evolution. But, then, that is the contribution one expects a community of "living myths" to make towards the purification and enrichment of their cultural and religious heritage in its ongoing progress as it encounters the new realities of life.

In this number of the *Journal of Dharma* we try to understand and interpret some of the aspects of Myths largely in the reference to the Indian scene. We, however, endorse to a great extent the already current in this matter, namely that Myth is a perfect, realistic and meaningful human expression of the primordial experience of man subject to the limitations of the techniques of communication, such as symbols, language, art, music, drama, sagas etc., peculiar to each culture according to their stages of development. We may, in particular, refer to religious myths as human symbolizations of the sacred activities of the "supernatural powers" as affecting humans, setting up paradigms of behaviour for the generations to come, helping a particular community to relate itself proudly to its undiscovered ancestry while keeping itself open towards future developments in life,

so "that in one way or another one 'lives' the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted" (M. Eliade: *Myth and Reality*).

Hence as Bronislaw Malinowski describes, "studied alive, myth... is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom... These stories... are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them" (*Myth in Primitive Psychology*).

Looking from these different angles, our contributors in this number while keeping the line of interpretation of their predecessors alive make their own suggestions for a still more positive understanding of the religious myths of the peoples. Dr. Brockway of Brandon University, Canada, makes a critical appraisal of the linguistic methodology of Max Müller, the pioneer of *Religionswissenschaft*, and suggests an historical approach to the study of Myths in order to cure "Mythology" of its "disease of language" as diagnosed by Max Müller. Prof. Raman of the Banaras Hindu University, presents a more realistic interpretation of the "Language of Myths in Religion". He pleads for a new hermeneutics which will be equally applicable to the interpretation of the Myths of East and West by the use of common criteria.

Dr. Amaladoss, of Vidyajyothi, Delhi, clarifies the interrelationship of Symbol and Mystery in understanding the full import of any myth. Dr. T.M. Manickam looks at the "Myths of Origins" from a comparative, philosophical point of view and tries to interpret the fundamental issues in these Myths of the Aryans and the Hebrews by applying certain common principles of Comparative Mythology. Rev. A.K. Chirapanath, a Research scholar in the Department of Philosophy of the Karnatak University,

discusses, with a certain hallucinatory mechanism of details, the often forgotten mythical structures of *Mantra and Yantra in Tantra*. This is, indeed, a very substantial study on Myth, with specific reference to the popular beliefs and practices of the Hindus even of the present day. Rev. Sr. Genevieve, a gifted Indian artist, paints the picture of the *Kāla Bhairava*, one of the most popularly adored icons of the Veera Saivites of Karnataka State in India. Her convincing interpretations of the artistic *symbols* of the icon may well lead us to an understanding and similar interpretations of the gallery of thousands of such pieces of devotional art kept in the sanctuaries of the Hindu temples, where Myths are still celebrated as part of the daily life of the people. Our many and varied approaches to the Mystery of the Myths are aptly concluded by a scholarly survey of the History of the development of the *Sabda* "AUM" (OM) by Ouseparampil, a Research Fellow in the Department of Sanskrit Studies, Sri Venkatesvara University, Tirupati. He also tries to clarify some of the aspects of the "mystique" of the term. We hope the efforts of these academics on the study of Myths in religion will serve to stimulate further work in this area by students of Comparative Religion in the years to come.

T.M. Manickam  
Managing Editor